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BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL

Report To The Congress

OF THE UNITED STATES

COMPLETED '8

Fresh Look Is Needed At Proposed South Florida Jetport

SUMMARY

To prevent serious environmental and ecological effects to the Everglades National Park, the United States, the State of Florida, and Dade County entered into the Jetport Pact of 1970. The Pact specifies that Dade County, with assistance from the State of Florida, will take necessary action to locate a replacement site for the training airport known as the Everglades Jetport. This replacement training airport, to be suitable for a future regional commercial airport, could be totally paid for by Federal funds (current estimate $162 million) in exchange for the land and training facilities at the Everglades Jetport.

Conditions leading to the Jetport Pact, particularly the need for an air carrier training facility, have changed considerably since the Pact was signed in 1970. GAO recommends that the United States not consent to renewing the Jetport Pact in January 1983 unless it is revised to recognize the changed conditions.

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COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S
REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

FRESH LOOK IS NEEDED AT PROPOSED SOUTH FLORIDA JETPORT

D I G E S T

To protect the Everglades, the United States entered into the Jetport Pact of 1970 with the State of Florida and Dade County, Florida. The Pact provides, as one alternative, that a suitable replacement site in south Florida for a regional airport be located and training facilities equivalent to those now at the Everglades Jetport be constructed without cost to the county. Until that time, the United States will not require Dade County to abandon the Everglades Jetport.

The Federal Aviation Administration says its intent under the Pact is to seek 100 percent Federal funding to acquire a suitable site in south Florida for a regional airport and to construct a new training airport at the site to replace the existing Everglades Jetport. The replacement airport is currently estimated to cost about $162 million--about $33 million for the land and about $129 million for the training facility. In exchange, the United States would receive title to the land and training facilities at the Everglades Jetport--owned by Dade County, Florida.

GAO made this review to assist the Congress in evaluating the Jetport Pact and in determining what action to take if and when funding to carry out the Pact is requested.

CONDITIONS WHICH LED TO THE JETPORT PACT HAVE CHANGED

In the 1960's air carrier training operations strained the capacity of Miami International Airport, and an additional regional commercial airport was predicted to be needed in south Florida by 1980. To satisfy these needs, Dade County acquired 39 square miles of land and constructed the Everglades Jetport which was opened for air carrier training operations in 1970. Operations at the jetport peaked in 1972 and by 1980 were less than one-third of the 1972 level. In that time technological advances in air carrier training simulators and recent Federal Aviation Administration regulations

permitting almost all air carrier training to be done in simulators have, in GAO's opinion, almost eliminated the need for an air carrier training facility. (See pp. 6 to 10.)

GAO therefore believes it is no longer necessary to construct a replacement training facility. If some actual use of aircraft for air carrier training is still needed in the future, such training could be handled at the existing Everglades Jetport apparently without significant adverse environmental impact, according to the final environmental impact statement. (See p. 9.)

When the Jetport Pact was signed, the signatories recognized a need for a new south Florida regional airport by 1980. The current projection puts the date at about 1995. Therefore, in the 12 years since the Pact was signed, the need for a new regional airport has moved about 15 years into the future. (See pp. 10 and 11.)

Since the need for an air carrier training airport has virtually disappeared, the primary justification for replacing the training airport apparently is now to satisfy projected general aviation training demands. General aviation primarily involves personal and business flying. The Jetport Pact did not specifically address general aviation needs. The capacity available at existing airports and planned expansions to them, however, will adequately satisfy predicted general aviation training needs to the year 2000. (See pp. 11 to 14.)

RECOMMENDATION TO THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

GAO is recommending that when the current extension to the Jetport Pact expires in January 1983, the Secretary not agree to renew it until it is revised to recognize that a training facility is no longer needed and that the claimed need for a regional airport has been moved 15 years into the future. (See pp. 14 and 15.)

AGENCY COMMENTS AND GAO's EVALUATION

The Department of Transportation said it cannot express a final position relative to GAO's findings and recommendations since it has not completed several evaluations which will

indicate how much, if any, it would propose to modify the Jetport Pact. Transportation does plan to have a position regarding the Pact when it comes up for renewal. (See p. 15.)

Dade County believes that the need for a training runway is a nonissue and that the real issue is the runway's ultimate use, not whether it should be constructed. Since the Jetport Pact addresses a replacement training facility, not an ultimate commercial runway, GAO believes that whether the United States should fund an ultimate commercial runway should be a matter of negotiation between the Jetport Pact signatories and ultimately a question for the Congress in deciding whether to appropriate funding. (See p. 15.)

The State of Florida believes this is a timely report which will be of value to the Jetport Pact signatories as they renegotiate the Pact.

POTENTIAL OPERATIONAL QUESTIONS AT SITE 14 REGIONAL AIRPORT NEED TO BE RESOLVED

Potential operational questions remain unresolved concerning developing a commercial airport at site 14, the replacement airport site, and could threaten the site's suitability as a regional commercial airport. (See p. 17.)

Commercial operations at a site 14 airport could reduce the total number of flights that can be handled at neighboring airports. Because several large airports in south Florida are nearby, operations at a site 14 airport will conflict with flights at these other airports. The effect could be significant enough to reduce overall south Florida aircraft operations even with the added capacity provided by the site 14 airport. (See pp. 17 to 20.)

According to Dade County aviation officials, control of all aviation activity in the south Florida airspace and new air traffic control technology will alleviate almost all of the potential airspace conflicts. Dade County has no evidence that new technology, even if available, will alleviate the conflicts since no analysis has been done on the effect of this technology on south Florida's air traffic. Federal Aviation Administration officials state that control over aviation activity will help

manage traffic better but will not eliminate the airspace conflicts. (See p. 20.)

Dade County aviation officials' planning for the ground transportation needs for a site 14 commercial airport is not consistent with established criteria. As a result, the ground transportation system recommended by Dade County aviation officials does not comply with established Dade County policy or the assumptions contained in the final environmental impact statement, which envisioned primary reliance on public transit while the present planning envisions primary reliance on the automobile. (See pp. 20 to 22.)

RECOMMENDATION TO THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

GAO is recommending that the Secretary satisfactorily resolve the airspace conflicts that commercial development at site 14 may create and the inconsistent ground transportation access planning for site 14. (See p. 23.)

AGENCY COMMENTS AND GAO's EVALUATION

Dade County has prepared an airspace study which it believes demonstrates the site's operational feasibility. GAO notes, however, that the Secretary of Transportation has the statutory responsibility for airspace utilization. The Department of Transportation advised GAO that it is still investigating the potential conflicts highlighted in the final environmental impact statement and is not prepared to comment on this section of the report at this time. (See p. 23.)

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ABBREVIATIONS

DCAD	Dade County Aviation Department
EIS	environmental impact statement
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
GAO	General Accounting Office
MIA	Miami International Airport